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Dow, Marcus Allen

Safety and short trains

[New York]

[1915]

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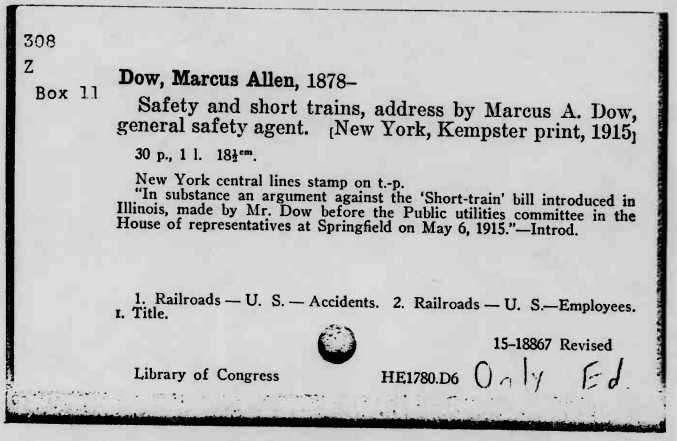

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Safety and short trains, address by Marcus A. Dow, general safety agent. [New York, Kempster print, 1915]

30 p., 1 l. 18½cm.

New York central lines stamp on t.-p.
"In substance an argument against the 'Short-train' bill introduced in Illinois, made by Mr. Dow before the Public utilities committee in the House of representatives at Springfield on May 6, 1915."—Introd.

1. Railroads — U. S. — Accidents. 2. Railroads — U. S.—Employees. I. Title.

15-18867 Revised

Library of Congress HE1780.D6 Only Ed.

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TECHNICAL MICROFORM DATA

FILM SIZE: 35 MM REDUCTION RATIO: 10:1 IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA (IIA) IB IIB

DATE FILMED: 1/14/97 INITIALS: AR

TRACKING # : 20158

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SAFETY

AND

SHORT TRAINS

BY

MARCUS A. DOW

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AND
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ADDRESS BY
MARCUS A. DOW
GENERAL SAFETY AGENT

INTRODUCTION

The following article is in substance an argument against the "Short-train" bill introduced in Illinois, made by Mr. Dow before the Public Utilities Committee in the House of Representatives at Springfield on May 6, 1915. Efforts have been made in several states to enact laws limiting the length of freight trains. In some states laws have been introduced to require additional men in train crews. These proposed laws, better known as "Short-train" and "Full Crew" laws, would, if passed, increase the operating expenses of the railroads millions of dollars annually. It is the contention of the proponents of such laws that they are necessary to increase safety. This article is a clear and concise statement as to the measure of safety existing on American steam railroads. It shows the fallacy of the contention that such laws are necessary to increase safety, and, further, that a train limit law would, in fact, increase rather than decrease the accident hazard.

SAFETY AND SHORT TRAINS

BY MARCUS A. DOW

General Safety Agent

New York Central Lines

This bill to limit the length of trains to a maximum of fifty cars per train has been presented and its passage urged as a measure of safety, it being the contention of the gentlemen favoring the measure that shortening the length of trains will lessen the chances of accident and reduce the number of injuries occurring on railroads incident to their operation. To persons unfamiliar with the details of personal injury work and the prevention of accidents as undertaken by the railroads of to-day, this argument may appear reasonable but before accepting it as a conclusion it is essential to consider a number of important facts. First of all, I wish to be understood as in favor of any sincere attempt to prevent accidents but as opposed to any movement fostered under a mask of safety for some ulterior purpose which is only to belittle and weaken the real safety movement and destroy the spirit it is intended to promote.

At the outset, the fact must be admitted, even by those the least informed, that safety in reality rests not upon whether there are a few cars more or less in a given train but upon the way in which that train and others on the same road are handled and operated. There is not now, nor has there ever been, a well-fortified argument for nor a sincere demand to shorten the length of trains to increase safety. The Interstate Commerce Commission in all of its exhaustive studies and reports has never pointed out a single case where the number of cars in a train, nor the number of men on a train, nor the number of engines hauling a train were factors contributing to or causing an accident.

If the proposition is fairly considered, it will appear reasonably certain that the passage of the so-called "Short-train" bill will increase rather than decrease the risk of injury.

For instance, we will suppose that on a piece of single track a hundred miles in length there are two trains of more than fifty cars starting from opposite ends of the road and traveling toward each other. There are just two trains to meet and pass each other; two trains for the despatcher to handle and two train crews that must be on the lookout, one for the other. But limit these trains to fifty cars and what happens?

The two trains are split into sections and, instead of but two trains to consider, arrange meeting points and be on the lookout for, there are now four trains, with manifestly double the risk of accident. In other words, the density of traffic as measured by the number of trains will increase with the shortening of the train, resulting in a greater chance of confusion and increasing the opportunity for error. This feature, of course, becomes more important on roads where the traffic is heavy and density of traffic is already a problem requiring the most skillful attention of expert operating men. Some roads handle a greater density of traffic than others because they have more trackage, more engines and better facilities for so doing and they have increased these facilities year by year as the growth of business demanded. To suddenly require all roads, however, to multiply the number of trains they must handle without a corresponding increase in trackage and other facilities would necessarily result in confusion, increased hazard and excessive delay.

Much stress has been laid by the supporters of this bill upon the great sacrifice of life and limb on the railroads of this country. Admitting freely that there are many persons injured on our railroads and that a large proportion of

the accidents resulting in injury can and should be avoided, I wish to point out how these accidents can be prevented and what steps are being taken to prevent them. For years there has been a nation-wide agitation in behalf of greater safeguards for employes of railroads, other industries and the general public. In every state there has been a veritable epidemic of legislation with a view of protecting the working man from possible injury. Safety devices of every description have been installed, rules formulated, regulations adopted and mechanical safeguards invented and applied until it would seem that accidents never could happen. But, the disquieting feature of the situation has been that up to a year ago, in spite of these extraordinary precautions taken to insure immunity from harm, accidents resulting in injuries increased steadily and the very laws that were made to lessen accidents actually seemed to foster them. It remained for the officials of the railroads and other great industries to discover where the real trouble lay. The conclusion was reached that, with all the laws which might be passed and safety devices which might be installed, there would be no successful reduction in accidents until there had been enlisted the co-operation of those persons in whose interest such precautions were

being taken. In other words, it was found that the *human element* was knocking all the carefully laid plans of well-meaning legislators into a cocked hat and, with this fact in mind, there has been launched within the past few years what has universally been called a "Safety-First" movement. Practically every railroad in the United States is now vigorously conducting such a movement, regardless of the expense incurred thereby. The method pursued on the New York Central Lines was not unlike that of the majority of other roads. The first step taken was to determine the great underlying cause of accidents and then apply the remedy. It was found that most of the accidents were chargeable to the human element. In fact the records indicated that only 9.65 per cent of all injury cases were due to defective equipment, conditions, tools or appliances, the balance being due to fault of injured man or another employe or else unavoidable.

Statistics of accidents on other railroads throughout the country show practically the same proportion of their injury cases due to human thoughtlessness or carelessness. The report of the Interstate Commerce Commission for the fiscal year 1914 divides all death and injury cases to railroad employes in accidents con-

nected with train operation under the following general causes:

Train accidents (collisions, derailments, etc.)	10%
Coupling or uncoupling cars	5%
While doing other work about trains (not in shops or engine houses) or while attending switches	44%
Coming in contact with overhead bridges, etc. while riding on cars	3%
Falling from cars or engines	12%
Getting on or off cars or engines	16%
Other accidents around trains	4%
Being struck or run over by engines or cars at stations or yards	4%
Being struck or run over by engines or cars at other places	2%
	100%

Thus, it is plainly seen that 90 per cent of such accidents to railroad employes are those that may be prevented by the exercise of greater care on the part of the individual rather than by such legislation as is proposed. It is shown *that only* 10 *per cent were in collisions or derailments,* which are, obviously, the only kinds of accidents this law is intended to prevent. In other words, without analyzing the small percentage of injuries due to train accidents to determine the causes of such accidents, the fact is clearly apparent that the big majority of accidents on railroads cannot be prevented by the making of laws and that the only preventative

is well-organized safety work conducted mainly along educational lines.

That the railroads entered into this safety work in good faith and desired to co-operate with the employes in the prevention of accidents to the fullest extent possible is demonstrated in the safety committee organizations authorized and fostered by railroad officials. On the New York Central Lines there are 60 of these Division and Shop Safety Committees with an aggregate of approximately 1,200 members and, as on other roads, these committee members consist, for the most part, of employes rather than officers.

These safety committees have been encouraged to freely report and discuss conditions and practices which, in their opinion, ought to be improved to increase the safety of the employes and the public. Since our committees were organized a total of 19,633 items have been reported by members with recommendations for correction in the interest of greater safety and the records show that to date 17,507 or 89 per cent of these items have been corrected. *Among all of the items brought up by these employe committees, however, there has never been a single reference to decreasing the length of trains or limiting the number of cars in trains*

or of increasing the number of men in a train crew, nor has there ever been a recommendation made by any of these committees that such a step be taken in the interest of greater safety.

A canvass of the roads entering the state of Illinois reveals the fact that these roads alone are spending approximately $200,000 a year in the maintenance of safety organizations. This expense includes only the cost of committee meetings, salaries of safety agents and inspectors, printing and other incidental expenses and does not include the money expended in correcting conditions upon recommendations of the safety committees which latter expense amounts to many hundreds of thousands of dollars annually. As an illustration, the New York Central Lines spent over $5,000 in the past three years purchasing safety goggles to protect its shopmen from eye injury while engaged in chipping and grinding work. This is one of the smaller items. Larger ones have included building overhead bridges, fences, walkways, installing improved lighting systems, guarding machinery and changing standards of appliances.

Besides the safety committee organizations, efforts to co-operate with the employes in accident prevention have extended in many ways. Safety Bureaus have been organized on

some of the roads with a corps of employes who devote their entire time to a study of the accident prevention problem and in the education of the employes to teach them to avoid unsafe practices. At frequent intervals in railroad terminals large safety rallies are held in theatres or halls where the railroad employes and their families are gathered together for mutual discussion. Here lectures are given and stereopticon views shown depicting unsafe and safer methods of performing railroad work. Inspection trips in special trains are made over the roads by the division committees to encourage the employes who make these trips to be alert for unsafe conditions that may arise. Books, pamphlets and circulars containing warnings against unsafe practices are distributed frequently to employes. The New York Central has equipped a safety exhibit car which contains models showing proper method of safeguarding dangerous machinery and of correcting improper conditions and photographs showing safe methods of performing railroad work. This car, accompanied by expert instructors, is taken over the system and daily instruction to employes on safety matters given therein. This road also produced a moving-picture drama, which depicts in a vivid and forceful manner,

through a visualized human interest story, many of the practices of railroad men which cause injuries and the unhappy consequences thereof. This picture is shown in a special car fitted out for that purpose and every employe is required to spend, on the company's time, the half hour or more necessary to witness this film. Other railroads have purchased and are using copies of the film.

The success of such accident prevention work depends almost wholly upon the co-operation of the employes. Railroad officials cannot observe the actions of all employes, nor any considerable part of them, at all times and it is therefore important that the employes themselves become imbued with the safety spirit, a spirit that will not only make them careful in their own actions but will cause them to caution their fellow-employes against unsafe practices when such practices are observed. That is the kind of co-operation which is necessary to make safety work a success and prevent accidents. The mere slogan "safety first" counts for nothing if the employes do not grasp its full meaning and live up to the spirit of it. If they believe in safety and believe it is a good thing to stop having accidents, then they must rally to the support of that principle by each and every man doing his share of co-opera-

tive and willing work to eliminate the real cause of accidents—the indulgence in careless practices. The passage of a train limit or full crew law will not prevent injury to an employe who carelessly goes in between moving cars to adjust a coupling device without taking the time to first stop the cars and who stumbles and falls under the wheels while in that perilous position. It is because the accident records conclusively show that the majority of injuries are caused by just such acts of carelessness as this that the railroads have launched their safety campaigns. The "safety first" movement of the railroads is not a joke, as one of the supporters of this bill has termed it. It is a serious, earnest and practical attempt to prevent accidents by the most effective means and it needs only the co-operation of the men in whose interest the effort is being made to make it successful.

I desire to call attention to some of the advertising matter that has been sent out by supporters of this "Short-train" bill and to some things contained therein which are intended to mislead those unfamiliar with all of the facts. A postal card sent broadcast decries the fact that 594,359 people were killed and injured on the railroads of this country in the three years from June 30, 1911 to June 30, 1914 and particular stress is

placed on the fact that 31,851 of these injuries resulted fatally. The fact that 16,463 of these persons killed, or more than 51 per cent, were trespassers who voluntarily and needlessly risked their lives by going upon the railroad tracks is intentionally suppressed. Nor is any explanation made that 12 per cent of the killed were travelers on the highway and that only 30 per cent of the killed were railroad employes while only 3 per cent of the killed were passengers. Supporters of the bill point accusingly to the fact that in three years there were 594,359 persons killed and injured on railroads in the country, leading you to believe that railroad work is the most hazardous of all occupations and that a railroad is a veritable industrial slaughter house, whereas, in truth, railroad casualties form only a small part of the total industrial accidents annually. Conservative statistics of large insurance and casualty companies indicate that from thirty to forty thousand persons in industrial occupations are killed and more than two million injured every year. These figures do not include other than industrial accidents, such as those occurring in the city streets, etc. The coroner's record for New York City indicates that during the year 1913 a total of 5,750 persons met violent death in the Borough of Manhattan

alone, of which 402 were in street accidents, 867 were due to falling out of windows, down stairways, off of scaffolds, etc. and 215 were due to accidental drowning. This, remember, is the record for only one city in the Union.

The average American will be astounded to learn of the large number of persons killed and injured in accidents in connection with agricultural work which is presumed by many to be a comparatively non-hazardous occupation. It is regrettable that there is no authoritative record of such accidents in this country but the records of the German Empire for the year 1908 indicate that 32.5 per cent of all permanent total disabilities resulting from industrial accidents in that country were in agricultural employments and 45 per cent of the permanent partial and 45 per cent of the temporary disability cases were chargeable to the same industry.

A further interesting comparison, as to the hazard in railroad work compared with other industries, is found in a statement published by the Prudential Insurance Company of America of the number of male persons killed per 1,000 employed, as follows:

	Persons killed per 1,000 employed.
Metal Mining	4.20
Coal Mining	3.50
Fisheries	3.00
Navigation	3.00
Railroad Employes	2.40

It will thus be seen that in reality there is less hazard connected with employment on a railroad than in four other important industries in the country.

It is only fair that we measure accurately just what degree of safety there exists on our railroads to-day in view of the intent of supporters of this bill to class them as alarmingly unsafe and in need of greater regulation. Interstate Commerce figures indicate that, during the year ended June 30, 1913, on all the railroads of the country, there were 181 passengers killed in train accidents while during that period there were 1,018,283,000 passengers carried. Therefore, there was one passenger killed in a train accident for every 5,625,873 carried, regardless of the distance they were carried. One of the gentlemen arguing in favor of this bill said he wanted to feel as safe while riding on a railroad passenger train as he would be on the city streets at home. Now, in the city of Chicago alone during 1913 there were 372 persons killed in the city streets by being struck or run over by some moving street vehicle. Chicago has a population of approximately 2,500,000. Therefore, *as against 372 inhabitants of Chicago killed in her streets by moving vehicles and hundreds more of her citizens killed in various other*

ways in a single year, the railroads of the country transported *more than twice as many passengers as Chicago has inhabitants before one was killed in a train accident.* In the cities of New York and Chicago during 1913 there were 774 persons killed in the city streets by being struck or run over by some moving street vehicle, and during the year ended June 30, 1914, there were only 85 passengers killed in train accidents on all the railroads of the country, so that *in those two cities alone there were nine times as many persons killed by vehicles in the streets as there were passengers killed in train accidents in the entire country.*

The proponents of this bill have insistently intimated that the railroads, almost without exception, have accidents every year resulting in fatal injuries to passengers, the statement having been made that it is questionable if any railroad except the New York Central went through last year without killing a passenger. This high compliment would be gladly accepted by the officials of the New York Central were the statement a truthful one as far as the other roads are concerned but, like other statements which have been made, it was made without investigation. The real truth of the matter is, that, while the New York Central Rail-

road did not kill a passenger in a train accident last year and, on its Lines East of Buffalo, has not killed a passenger in over four years, during which time it has carried in that territory passengers equal in number to more than twice the entire population of the United States, yet there are many other roads with enviable records of a similar character. In fact, during the fiscal year 1913, there were, in the United States, steam railroads of 299 operating companies, with a mileage of 120,901 miles, which is practically one-half the entire railroad mileage of the United States and which, if stretched out into one long railroad, would form a steel girdle extending five times around the globe, on which there was not a passenger killed in a train accident, although there were more than four hundred million passengers carried by these roads, a number equal to four times the country's population.

So much for the safety of passengers as it exists on railroads to-day. Now let us see what degree of safety there is for the employe as far as train accidents are concerned. Interstate Commerce figures also indicate that in the year ended June 30, 1913 there were 557 employes killed in train accidents. During that same period the railroads transported 300,558,334,000

tons of freight one mile with an average of 14.31 tons of freight per car, or 21,003,377,638 loaded cars one mile, so that one employe was killed in a train accident for every 37,708,039 loaded cars moved one mile. And what does this indicate? Simply this, that for every *hundred* loaded cars operated a distance of 377,080 miles one employe was killed. And this, mind you, does not take into consideration the vast number of empty cars handled at the same time. In other words, *one railroad employe was killed in a train accident for each hundred loaded cars transported a distance equal to 15 times around the world, or as far as from the earth to the moon and half way back.*

The record for 1914 is even better, as on the same basis of computation only one employe was killed in a train accident for every hundred loaded cars transported seventeen and a half times around the world. Therefore, let us not give way to hysterical reasoning or be misled by unanalyzed figures which tend to place railroads in an unfavorable and unpleasing light as to their accident records.

Another fact, in connection with these figures, indicating 594,359 persons injured and killed on the railroads in three years which must not be overlooked is that the majority of these injuries were of a more or less trivial character. We

know that a little over 31,000 of the cases resulted fatally, of which 51 per cent were trespassers. Of the injuries every case is included where the employe lost more than three days from work, and injuries were reported as such which often consisted of only a bruise or scratch of the hand or some other minor injury. An examination of the New York Central record of injuries for a year indicates that only one out of every 227 employes injured was permanently disabled. During the seven months from July 1, 1914 to January 31, 1915, 130,000 reports of injuries to employes were made to the New York State Workmen's Compensation Commission. It is a significant fact that but something over 22,000 of these employes lost in excess of 14 days time as a result of injury.

Other interesting and enlightening facts may be gleaned from a further analysis of the Interstate Commerce Commission figures. For instance, as already stated, the Commission's records indicate that but 10 per cent of all employe injury cases are due to collisions and derailments. Even the majority of these can be prevented only by greater care on the part of human beings involved in the accidents. The Interstate Commerce Commission employs expert investigators who make investigations into

the causes of wrecks on railroads throughout the country. These investigations are exhaustive and often weeks and even months are consumed enquiring into every detail of a single train accident. During the 12 years 1902-1913 the Commission investigated through its own agents 1,570 train accidents, of which only 218 or 14 per cent were caused by defective track, equipment or appliances and 15 per cent were due to bad weather, outside agencies, unknown causes or unavoidable, while 1,120 or 71 per cent of the train accidents investigated by the commission in the 12 years were found to have been due *to the fault of a member of the train crew, a despatcher, operator or some other employe.* The human element! It can never be effaced by all the safety appliances that can ever be invented and applied, nor by all the laws and regulations that can ever be passed and enforced. The one great, powerful factor which will curtail and reduce and which is already curtailing and reducing injuries and deaths to railroad and other industrial employes is co-operation between employers and employes to increase the carefulness of the employes, train them to *think* and to avoid *taking chances.* It is this spirit of co-operation that the railroads are spending time, money and effort

to develop and foster. *It is this spirit of co-operation that will prevent more accidents than all the laws that were ever passed or ever will be passed intended to regulate the safety of modern transportation.*

That the railroads stand firmly upon the principle of safety as the first consideration is manifest in every phase of railroad development. Improvements are made in construction, equipment and the efficiency of their personnel on the basis of safety before cost. *Safety in railroading is as necessary to successful operation as is the roadbed itself—it is the doctrine upon which all the rules of operation and maintenance are founded —it is the creed upon which every railroad official builds his hope of successful advancement, for without safety to a reasonable degree a railroad could not exist and do business.* This is an age of competition, and it is worthy of note that prominent among other things the railroads of to-day vie with each other to attain the best and most favorable record in accident prevention. In view of all this, is it not reasonable to conclude that, if it were necessary to limit the number of cars in a train to insure their safe transportation over the road, the roads themselves would, for their own protection and to save their own property, adopt such regula-

tion without legislative mandate? But there is not only no proof that the shortening of trains to 50 cars or less will lessen the number of accidents but there is conclusive evidence that increasing the cars in a train does not increase accidents. *On the New York Central Railroad the average number of cars per train increased 9 per cent in 1914 over 1913 notwithstanding which fact there was a decrease in every class of accident. There was a decrease of 73 per cent in road trainmen killed in through service and 39 per cent injured; of road trainmen in yards a decrease of 33 per cent killed and 42 per cent injured; of yard trainmen a decrease of 19 per cent killed and 39 per cent injured.* While a part of this decrease was brought about by safety educational work, it is partly attributable to the fact that with an *increase in the average number of cars per train there was a decrease of 18 per cent in the number of trains run.*

The following statement of death and injury cases in train accidents on all the railroads is taken from the Interstate Commerce Commission's records for the fiscal years 1913-1914:

		1913	1914	Decrease
Passengers	killed	181	85	53%
"	injured	8662	7001	19%
Employes	killed	557	452	19%
"	injured	6905	4823	30%

Here is further substantial proof that long trains do not increase hazard but rather do they decrease hazard. There was in 1914, throughout the country, a decrease in all classes of injuries in train accidents and it is known that the length of trains did not decrease in that period but rather did it increase, while the number of trains operated on the roads in general decreased, thereby decreasing the hazard.

The contention is made that with a shorter train there would be a better opportunity for the crew to make inspection of the running gear, brake rigging, etc. while stopping at points en route. In the first place, it should be clearly understood that on virtually every railroad today trains are made up in terminals by a yard crew, are inspected before leaving by car inspectors located at the terminal and then turned over to a road crew, which latter crew has nothing to do with the train until it is made up, inspected and ready to leave the terminal. As far as the more lengthy trains are concerned, the only stops made are, as a rule, to take water or at meeting or passing points. The men in train crews, like all other employes, are expected to live up to the rules which govern their work and the length of a train, no matter whether long or short, can not be accepted as an excuse for not

making such inspections as may be required of them.

The longer trains must necessarily travel at slower speed than the shorter ones so that possibility of accident to the long train is decreased thereby.

As to the contention that accidents would result from drawheads pulling out on longer trains; while it is true that drawheads do pull out occasionally, it is an occurrence not confined to long trains and the truth of the matter is when they do pull out it is usually when the train is starting and at a time when no accident would occur.

I do not wish to be understood as finding fault with the employes of railroads as a class. As has been pointed out, the safety work on railroads is a co-operative work. *The gratifying results which were obtained in the substantial accident reductions on railroads last year were largely brought about by the efforts of the men themselves who have grasped the spirit of the movement and attained an increased degree of thoughtfulness for personal safety.* The problem of preventing accidents is mainly a psychological one. The man factor is the big factor in this problem. Every man entering the railroad service must be instructed and then

examined and finally put out on the road. Oftentimes these men, who make a good showing in their examinations and tests, have concealed somewhere in them bad traits of character or habits of carelessness which are not discovered until an accident happens. This is a risk that is increased with every new man employed on a road. To suddenly increase the employes to the number that would be necessary to man the many additional trains the passage of this law would require would mean another element of increased hazard instead of a decrease in hazards, because every green man that is employed is an experiment at the best. In fact, the real underlying object of this bill is to create jobs and increase employment unnecessarily.

For years the railroads have been expending vast sums of money in the interest of safety by improving equipment and conditions and installing safety appliances. This expense has included building steel cars, installing block signals, eliminating grade crossings and many other improvements for the benefit, not only of its employes and passengers, but the general public. To meet this continual growing expense, which, of course, is greatly augmented by increased wages and other items, it has been necessary for the railroads to adopt measures of the

greatest economy and to secure the highest efficiency possible. As a general proposition the handling of a maximum amount of traffic at a minimum expense compatible with safe operation is an efficiency item of the greatest importance. If the railroads should now be required to limit the length of their trains to fifty cars, thereby multiplying the number of trains they must run, at a greatly increased expense for additional help, additional engines and additional fuel to run them, the money thus wasted would necessarily curtail the expenditures which would otherwise be made for real safety improvements.

In closing, let me reiterate that the railroads stand for safety as a basic principle and if this proposed law to limit the length of trains were in fact, as contended, a necessary measure to increase safety, there would be no strong opposition to it. But such contention is not sustained by facts. *There is no reasonable argument in support of the measure while, on the other hand, facts and statistics clearly and unmistakably demonstrate that such regulation as this proposed law imposes would increase rather than decrease the risk of injury.* In view of all of these circumstances and considering the earnest, studious and expert work that the railroad offi-

cials are doing in the best of faith to prevent accidents and with the highest possible motive—that of conserving human life—the passage of such a burdensome, unnecessary and actually injurious law as this "short-train" proposition is would be to inflict upon the railroads, upon the public and upon the employes of the railroads themselves, a colossal injustice, for which there can be no excuse or reasonable explanation offered in palliation.

NOTE:—Bills to limit the length of freight trains were introduced during the past year in the Legislatures of nineteen states. In fourteen of the states the Legislatures adjourned without passing the bills. Such bills were still pending in five states on June 1, 1915.

KEMPSTER PRINT
NEW YORK

MSH # 20158

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